



**TESTIMONY ON SB 488 – Sen. Don Ryan
Senate Education and Cultural Resources
February 19, 2007**

Chairman Ryan and members of the committee, for the record, I am Pete Carparelli,
Executive Director of the Montana Quality Education Coalition.

I appear on behalf of MQEC and as an opponent of SB 488 sponsored by Senator Ryan.

In previous testimony I have shared with you the goals of MQEC and its approach to proposed legislation related to the funding of Montana's public elementary and secondary schools. Although I will not present such a preamble again today, I will submit it as part of my written testimony.

As you know, the goal of the Montana Quality Education Coalition is adequate stable on-going funding for quality public K-12 education as defined in 20-9-309 MCA passed by the Montana Legislature in 2005 and as assured by the Montana Constitution. MQEC is evaluating legislation proposed during the 2007 Legislature, and supports such legislation that adequately addresses one or more of the requirements of 20-9-309 MCA and meets the state's constitutional obligation to adequately fund our public K-12 school system. It has provided information to assist the Legislative and Executive branches their considerations of proposed legislation dealing with Montana's public elementary and secondary schools. Chief amongst that information is the MQEC Adequacy Report, Estimating the Cost of an Adequate Education in Montana.

MQEC honors the Court's recognition of the legislature's right to phase in any remedy over time, and MQEC will support legislation as part of a phase-in

remedy that explicitly prescribes a cost-based approach and leads to a defined funding goal over a specified period of time.

MQEC will oppose legislation that is not consistent with 20-9-309 MCA and the Court's decision, negates the progress toward adequacy that has already been achieved, or does not recognize the need to make school funding more cost-based.

Although we are happy that Senator Ryan sees the need to address the State's share of school funding, MQEC must oppose passage of SB 488, "An Act Defining the "State Share" of the Costs of the Basic System of Free quality Public (Schools);" because, even in its simplicity and apparent straightforward and brief language we cannot ascertain it impacts – for better or worse. We are unsure of possible unintended consequence of this simple change in definition.

We also oppose it because the title purports to define the "State Share" as a function of "*the costs*" (emphasis added) of the basic system of free quality schools. We would argue that the language within the bill actually defines the "State Share" as "*the amount of money provided*" (emphasis added) to a school district for BASE budget purposes. Our contention is and has been that BASE funding is neither adequate nor cost-based.

We urge consideration of new work in collaboration with Senator Ryan, other bill sponsors who have addressed school funding, a wider representation of the educational community, and with the Executive Branch. Together, we can come up with an acceptable funding system that shows a way forward toward an acceptable "State share" of cost-based and adequate funding of a basic system of free quality public elementary and secondary schools.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you this afternoon. Thank you, Senator Ryan for bringing SB 488 to the Legislature.